



What's your thing?

by
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When the sun came up, it was obvious the company had not occupied the assembly area to standard. Security was non-existent; vehicles were clustered and facing in odd directions as if some giant had thrown them down like a hand full of toy jacks. People were strolling around and having casual conversations as if speaking over a backyard fence; there was no semblance of a tactical assembly area.

I was new to Alpha Company and had been in command for one week; but this could not stand. I decided to make occupying assembly areas my personal area of emphasis; this would be my “thing.” I resolved that performing this task to standard was a matter of discipline, and Alpha Company would transition from its current undisciplined state to occupying assembly areas as a point of unit pride. The purpose of this article is not to focus on the occupation of tactical assembly areas (although assembly area occupation is an outstanding topic upon which volumes should be written,) but to make the case that leaders at all levels should select a readiness-enhancing initiative(s) and make it their “thing.”

So what is a “thing” and why should leaders have one? A “thing” is an action, a process, an enterprise and/or project you are passionate about. To be clear, a leader’s “thing” is nothing more than a niche, technical specialty, area of expertise, or passion. No one can tell you what your “thing” should be because if you do not feel strongly about it, then it is most likely someone else’s “thing.” Organizations inside and outside of the military, benefit from experts in a particular discipline—those people that are passionate about what they do.

“Things” come in all shapes and sizes. I once worked for a boss who’s “thing” was unit history. He knew something about every battle and every commander in the unit’s two hundred year lineage. He could relate these stories to young Soldiers in such a way as to increase moral and unit pride. For others, their “thing” may be maintenance, knowledge of regulations, personnel actions, or the nuances of occupying a tactical assembly area.

Although leaders’ “things” can be as varied as the leaders themselves; there are some rules for having and espousing a “thing” that must be adhered to:

- **Your “thing” must have significant meaning to you:** Before a leader is able to demonstrate enthusiasm for a subject, the subject must hold special meaning for the leader. The “thing” upon which the leader places value should not be a personal peeve, but an area or task

that will enhance the performance of the organization or bring goodness into people's lives.

- **You must know more about your “thing” than anyone else:** Be the resident expert and know more than anyone else about your “thing”. This requires energy and time investment on the part of the leader. For instance, before I could call myself an expert on assembly areas, I had to read the doctrine, study the tactics and techniques, and review applicable historical examples. Once the fundamentals are understood, decide how to tackle the subject; make a plan and develop talking points.
- **Tell people about your “thing” and why it matters to you:** Get excited and talk about your “thing” to people. Never pass on an opportunity to tell others why this is important and why it matters to you (and why it should matter to them as well.)
- **Encourage others to have a “thing” of their own:** Once you have your “thing” established, encourage others to decide what their “thing” will be. Everyone should have an area of interest, a topic they get excited about. You will find “things” make people and organizations better.

The reader should be warned that before a leader delves into a specific area of expertise, their “thing,” the leader should be comfortable in accomplishing the standard, routine and expected tasks commensurate with their position. The message here is to first get the basics right and then become an expert in a “thing” that excites; a leader's “thing” must be additive to an already well rounded person and leader.

My “thing” as a young officer was occupying tactical assembly areas. Once I decide to make this my “thing,” I became the expert in the company and eventually the entire Brigade on the fine art of marking, occupying, establishing priorities of work, security, establishing communications and planning assembly area operations; all accomplished with absolute noise and light discipline. I always said you can tell the level of training and discipline of a unit by how well it occupies tactical assembly areas....sorry, I guess I regressed, but this is my “thing.” What's yours?

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